

Meaning Of The Heart

By Thaniyo Thero

“What, friends, is the earth element? The earth element may be either internal or external. What is the internal earth element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and appropriated; that is, head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and appropriated: this is called the internal earth element. Now both the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’ When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the earth element.

“Now there comes a time when the water element is disturbed and then the external earth element vanishes. When even this external earth element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is appropriated by craving and lasts but a while? There can be no consideration of that as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am.’ “ - [Mn28](#)

Bring your attention to your heart. It's situated almost at the centre of your torso, to the left just under the rib cage. Sense its movements. Notice the beat, the rhythm, the muscular throb, the squish and pump of blood.

If that piece of moving flesh were to stop or miss a beat, your breathing would stop, you would pass out and away or you might just have a tiny stroke, leaving you handicapped for many years to come. Your life would change, either a little or a lot. Your plans for tomorrow would cease, your skills would mean nothing, your lifestyle would be affected. Your family or friends and your deepest prayers will not make that piece of flesh in your chest keep working if it just stops. The heart cannot hear you, it is not aware of your intentions, your missions, your loves or hates. It just pumps blood...not for you or even itself, it just pumps blood. It doesn't have a personality, it is not personally invested in anything that you do. It is an impersonal piece of flesh which your life is directly and structurally, dependent on.

The heart organ in your chest is inaccessible to you. Even if you were, through the marvels of modern medical science, able to physically open up your chest and not bleed to death, you would still find a heart organ which you would have no internal access to. You could touch it, but you cannot create it or control it directly. Which means that you can affect it only secondarily, but you cannot choose the heart's rhythm and beat to determine your life status or not, it does so whether you like it or not. It determines your life, and without it, your choices cannot occur.

Attend to the heart, really get a good overall sense of its movement and weight....and now with full intent, choose for it to stop beating.

What you will discover is that you are “outside” of it, even though you would say that it is inside of you. That core of your personal body is inaccessible to you, it is not yours to control, it is not you. Your overall sense of body is undermined by a thing which is not yours and which it relies upon for its life. Such a REVEALation highlights this gratuitous assumption that “the body is mine, or is my-self”. It reveals a contradiction, you assume the body to be yours, yet it is anything but yours. You realise, “My whole sense of self is situated on top of, or undermined by organs which do not belong to me or to anyone else anywhere.”

“I don’t belong to anyone anywhere. And nothing belongs to me anywhere.”

By often practicing and living in this way, their mind becomes confident in that dimension.

Being confident, they either attain the dimension of nothingness now, or are freed by wisdom.”

-Mn106

Sense of self can only exist, if there is something being taken as self. However, if it turns out that that which one takes as self, is in fact not belonging to me, then that self has no legs to stand on, so to speak. It slowly falls apart, it fades away, because it needs *something* to assume to be itself. Something accessible, something mine. Yet there is no-thing here that we can find as such.

“Bhikkhus, that assumption(of ownership, of self) is neither the same as these five aggregates subject to assumption, nor is the assumption something apart from the five aggregates subject to assumption. But rather, the desire and lust for them, that is the assumption there.” - Sn22.82

Your life is dependent on that heart. You can pay attention to what you are doing whether walking, sitting, thinking, writing, making coffee, etc. However, at the back of your mind you should remember and keep reminding yourself of the meaning of that presently enduring heart beating in your chest. As you go about your day, as you act towards various things that occupy your attention (the foreground), remember that there in the background is a heart which is determining your activities. Once that situation becomes clearer, try to understand what it *means*.

You could also try and pay attention to the beating heart directly, but still try to discern its *meaning* peripherally, in the background. Meaning of non-ownership and inaccessibility. You can also discern in the background the rest of your body, your mood, thoughts, intentions, desires, and notice just how dependent it all is on this heart here beating that I am attending to, and just how dependent this heart here is on those things working well for it to be. Let the meaning of that reveal itself, i.e notice what that situation of “your life actions being determined by this living, fleshy organ” means. Start to discern the dangerous position that you are in. In other words, discern the *paticcasamuppada* principle - with my heart beating, my life is; when there is my life, there is my heart beating.....

“Bhikkhus, do you see: ‘This’?”—“Yes, venerable sir.”—“Bhikkhus, do you see: ‘This manifests with that as a nutriment’?”—“Yes, venerable sir.”—“Bhikkhus, do you see: ‘With the cessation of that nutriment, what has come to be is subject to cessation’?”—“Yes, venerable sir.” - [Mn38](#)

“And which is the noble method which is properly seen by him [i.e. the noble disciple], properly penetrated with understanding? Here, householder, a noble disciple attends properly, with perspective on the source, to this very dependent origination:

When there is this, there is this.

When there isn’t this, there isn’t this.

When this arises, this arises.

When this ceases, this ceases.” - [SN 12:41](#)

or

While keeping that situation in mind, seeing in that “simultaneously dependent principle” way. Reflect how that beating heart here can stop now, or...now or maybe later...and so on. Try to discern the meaning of that. Meaning of being liable to death. - [Marananussati](#)

or

Expand your awareness to other parts of the body which you also do not have ownership over. The brain, intestines, veins, lungs, muscles, etc. Discern the meaning of that. That this body, all its parts, are all dependent on each other, and your gratuitous ownership of them is not even a requirement for them to continue their mindless task of being bodily organs. - [Patikūlamānasikāra \(32parts meditation\)](#)

or

Breathe in long and short and so on, while at the back of your mind knowing the heart, the body, the feelings, the intention, the choice to breathe in long and short, all enduring there simultaneously dependent... all being inaccessible to your desires of ownership. Even, despite being able to manipulate the breath, the bodily-intention to breathe is not your own. Develop those discernments, uncover their meaning more and more. See the phenomena of *anicca-dukkha-anatta* and make that clear as day. - [Anapanasati](#).

Such contemplations into the nature of your existence and your attachments, will most likely unnerve you at first, but if you are accomplished in precepts and sense restraint, then you won’t have anxiety that will overwhelm you when you repeatedly see this and not turn away from the unpleasant truth that says, “your very self is not your own”.

Pay attention to the heart again. Where does its energy come from? Do you have access to that? You can of course imagine or make up some story about where the energy or *life force* comes from, but that would only be done because you cannot sit with the fact that you don't know where it comes from. That uncertainty reveals the deeper meaning of your situation, which in turn makes you feel very uncomfortable, and so you try to get rid of that discomfort by telling yourself a story to make yourself feel better about your existence which is not your own.

What if that *energy* stops? Then the heart will stop moving. The heart then is also not its own. It too is dependent upon that which it is not in its control. And so if I do not even have access to the heart organ in this body, what is to say about that which the heart depends on?

That energy, the activation, the life force, one could call consciousness, the animation of things, the presence of things. That energy is not known without that which is energised, such as the heart. I couldn't know about the "heart energy" if there was no moving fleshy piece of meat. I can try to fantasise about the origin of that energy and call it god, biology, or whatever else, but that would just be another assumption used to cover up the reality that that particular energy is completely inaccessible to me while I am intimately dependent upon it. Both the fleshy heart and its *energy* do not know me, they are both not mine, not my friend or enemy. They are both there, doing what they do, when both are there.

"Now tell me, friend Sāriputta: Is name-&-form self-made or other-made or both self-made & other-made, or—without self-making or other-making—does it arise spontaneously?"

"It's not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that name-&-form is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made & other-made, or that—without self-making or other-making—it arises spontaneously. However, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form."

"Now tell me, friend Sāriputta: Is consciousness self-made or other-made or both self-made & other-made, or—without self-making or other-making, does it arise spontaneously?"

"It's not the case, Koṭṭhita my friend, that consciousness is self-made, that it is other-made, that it is both self-made & other-made, or that—without self-making or other-making—it arises spontaneously. However, from name-&-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness."

"...Now how is the meaning of these statements to be understood?"

"Very well then, Koṭṭhita my friend, I will give you an analogy; for there are cases where it is through the use of an analogy that intelligent people can understand the meaning of what is being said. It is as if two sheaves of reeds were to stand leaning against one another. In the same way, from name-&-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-&-form. From name & form as a requisite condition come the six sense media. From the six sense media as a requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a

requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering & stress.

“If one were to pull away one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall; if one were to pull away the other, the first one would fall. In the same way, from the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of consciousness, from the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation of name-&-form. From the cessation of name-&-form comes the cessation of the six sense media. From the cessation of the six sense media comes the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact comes the cessation of feeling. From the cessation of feeling comes the cessation of craving. From the cessation of craving comes the cessation of clinging/sustenance. From the cessation of clinging/sustenance comes the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming comes the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, then aging-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair all cease. Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering & stress.”-SN
[12:67](#)

That *energy* which the body depends on, is itself dependent on the body being available. Neither aspect of this situation as a whole can be seen or known as independently arisen, and any independence is a complete fantasy on my part, an assumption on account of the pressuring ambiguity of my existence which is not in my control.

Take for example a computer game which can have a third person view of some character, walking in the bottom centre of the screen. That in a way, is how one should try and view one's first person viewpoint, such a viewpoint would be a right type of viewing. A way of seeing and knowing this situation that you are framed by. In life, you can see other people, over there or near you, and they are not what you think you are. They are others who are “over there”, and likewise is your body to others, the same way their bodies are to you - “an other over there”. No matter how close they appear. Your body is on the same plain of the other bodies you do not own. Your body is equally not owned by you.

If I can take this body which happens to be very close to this point of view, as for me, or belonging to me, as self, I can also take other bodies and things which are a little bit further away, like cars, house, wife, child, cattle, wealth, country, and so on, i.e my sense of ownership, my self has no limits, it can take everything personally. If I can assume that a part of this nama-rupa domain, which is not-mine, as mine, then I can assume any part of that domain to be mine or for me.

Take, again the example of a computer game, where you're playing a character. That game is dependent upon electricity. When there is no electricity there is no game. The electricity helps to animate the game, it is not the game, yet is essential to it. These computer games can be played from a first person point of view,

whereby you just see the arms and legs, etc. Such a point of view is the way we view the world, but it would be useful to try and view our first person point of view in a third person point of view manner, an ability to self-reflect, to mentally step back and be aware of the situation as a whole while we go about our day.

However, unlike the game that we are outside of, this life, we are inside of, we are inside as the assumption of ownership. We are not outside. Our assumption of self cannot be found anywhere else except here, surrounded by the situation as a whole. We only know this which we are completely surrounded by, and to think that there is outside of this or that we are enclosed and separated from a greater external reality which is beyond this, means that we are assuming a reality, we are imagining a reality which cannot be known and thus living in delusion. The reality that we are imagining beyond *this* is nowhere else to be found except here as an assumption in regard to this situation and its components.

Therefore, this sense of self, being *second* to the situation as a whole, being *dependent upon* an assumption of ownership in regard to this situation as a whole, is *unownable*. It is dependently manifested, not self-manifested. It depends on there being a situation as a whole, operating, on its own. My self, then, is not my own because the things which my self depends on for its existence, *cannot be* my own.

Sense the rhythm of the heart throughout your day, tune into its meaning of *anicca-dukkha-anatta*, and let your *Self* fall apart.
